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THE WORK OF MISSIONS ESSENTIAL TO THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH.

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THE WORK OF MISSIONS ESSENTIAL TO THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

A SERMON

DELIVERED IN THE

SEMINARY CHAPEL

NOVEMBER 7TH, 1880

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PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE STUDENTS

PRINCETON

PRESS PRINTING ESTABLISHMENT

1880

SERMON.

EPH. III, 6. *That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.*

It may seem an unnecessary task to endeavor to shew that the work of missions is essential to the life of the church, that it is involved in the idea of its being, and in the history of its origin; and that the New Testament in its doctrine and its history sets forth the salvation of the world as the object of the gospel, and lays the responsibility for the accomplishment of that object upon the missionary agency of the Church. It is so true that it seems like a truism; and yet, like many things of primary importance, there is danger that it be left to take care of itself in the search after less obvious and practical interests.

The commission was given by our Saviour to his disciples before his ascension to go into all the world, and to preach the gospel to every creature. Terms could not be found wider or more inclusive. And the limit of time they were to tarry at Jerusalem was set at Pentecost, when they should be endued with power from on high. And yet we find, so far as we have an account of their work in the Book of Acts, which though not complete in detail, must be accurate in principle, that they were content to remain in Jerusalem for fourteen years preaching to none but Jews only; and that the gospel was carried to the Gentiles, not by the apostles in the first instance, but by the church; and that the church herself had first to be scattered by persecution among the nations, before

the spirit of the gospel burning in the hearts of believers, impelled them to preach wherever they went; and where there was preaching there were conversions, and where there were believers, there was the church. Not till the gentile church of Antioch was founded, did Jerusalem send Barnabas to oversee it; and not until fourteen years after the ascension did the church at Antioch enter upon the first systematic and ecclesiastical effort to spread the gospel in the world, in equipping and sending forth Barnabas and Paul. And even yet, the original apostles took no direct part in thus carrying out the commission of the Saviour, but remained in Jerusalem, or were content, no doubt for wise reasons, to go to the Jews while Paul preached to Gentiles. No new revelation of truth was involved in this extension; no new commission; no principle inculcated which had not been taught them by the Master; and yet we see how slowly and partially they reached a personal understanding of what was involved in the truth they taught, and a practical recognition of its consequences. And so it has been ever since. The church cannot live except by growing, it cannot exist except by extending itself. And yet, throughout its history, it has been occupied with controversies, with the development and settlement or reformation of its doctrines, with the discussion of its relations to the state, or with the struggle for existence under persecution, and its work of missions has been lost sight of, or relegated to a secondary place in its estimation, instead of being regarded as the reason for its being, and the legitimate sphere of its activity. And even in these days of missionary agencies, we are apt to regard the work as accessory rather than fundamental; to draw distinctions between its various departments more than to insist upon its essential unity; and therefore to underrate the effect of this work upon the spirituality of the church, and upon our own personal spiritual life. It will be profitable to see how much evidence exists that missions are not modern, and to study the relations in which they are set in the New Testament.

1. I can only briefly allude at the outset to the truth, which I may not pass over, that the whole scheme of salvation has its origin in the love of God, and that the limits and conditions of that love are in God himself. It is not because one race, or one man, is more worthy than another that God bestows his love; but his love bestowed becomes the cause of their becoming worthy of it. God so loved the world in its sin and misery, as to purpose to save it at vast sacrifice. And that originating principle, therefore, determines the application of salvation, and sets the measure of our responsibility wide as the sweep of the love of God.

And moreover, as love is the originating principle of salvation, so it becomes the organizing and life principle of those who are saved. Men are saved by the love of God, overcoming the enmity and opposition of the heart to God, bringing the soul into harmony with the truth, furnishing the principle and motive of new obedience to the will of God. Love, therefore, is to such a degree the life principle of the redeemed, that it must determine all their relations to God and to their fellow men. Saved by love, they are by virtue of salvation, lovers of God and lovers of men. Free giving implies not only free acceptance, but free giving in return to others. The same principle which originated salvation, and applied it in any individual case, works outward with resistless impulse, burning and shining, for the salvation of the world, manifesting its heavenly origin by working as God works, vindicating itself to the believer and to the world as genuine and divine, by this divine activity. And as a principle which has power enough to accomplish the work is the origin of the whole scheme, so every declaration of the purpose of God in salvation reveals the same extension. Read that exalted doxology to the grace of God in Eph. 1, traversing the whole scheme from its source in the purpose of God to its present realization of spiritual gifts by both Jews and Gentiles; that is, all men everywhere and without distinction. The Apostle sets forth its design, its characteristics, and its blessings, all in

order to the glory of God. It is first in the purpose of God, it is realized in redemption by the blood of Christ; and then, the mystery before hidden, is revealed; "according to the good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself, that in the dispensation of the fulness of times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are in earth, even in him." And this salvation is thus said to have been appropriated when revealed, both by Jews and Gentiles, and then, "sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory."

2. I might dwell on the evidences of this universal adaptation in the first form of the promise of this salvation, as it came into history. It was for man. A promised man from heaven should win salvation for men. And even when in the development of the purpose, the election of God was narrowed to a nation, the promise was not narrowed; for the blessing to Abraham was to include all nations. And, as the apostle argues, the law which was given afterwards, could neither annul the promise nor add to its conditions. And in like manner, we might recall the prophecies of Messiah's Kingdom, which are of universal scope, including all without distinction, and unto the complete establishment of the reign of righteousness. With all this pride and hatred of Gentiles, and mistake as to the spiritual meaning of their own prophecies, the Jews never dreamed that these were to be confined to themselves. The law should be perpetual, but the nations were to be admitted to its privileges; so that our Saviour testified of the Pharisees, that "they compassed sea and land to make one proselyte." The whole Old Testament is full of this idea of universal salvation.

But turning to the New Testament,

3. We might dwell at length on the Person and Work of Christ, in order to appreciate how impossible it is to associate any idea of restriction with these. In Him the love of God has its highest manifestation. He considered not his own glory,

but sacrificed himself for men. He passed over angels that were fallen in order to devote himself to a most foreign mission, to another world, and to a lower and lost race. How much is implied in that phrase, characteristic of the Gospel of John, God *sent him* into the world! It implies the eternal pre-existence and therefore the divine dignity of the Lord. It shows the infinite love of God in the sacrifice of such a Saviour. It implies the preparation and equipment of the Son in the character of the Revealer of the Father, his representative and agent in the execution of his purpose. Sent him away, from God, from glory, from heaven, to the life on earth, to the cross and sepulchre; and thereby constituted him the type of all who are to engage in any part of the work of promoting the purpose of his sending.

"The word became flesh." In the Incarnation the universality of this salvation is conspicuous. He became man for all men. Not for the Jews, nor favoured races of men, the philosophical, the refined, the heroic, the cultured. Such distinctions vanish beneath the infinite condescension of his coming. The lowest are no more removed from him than the highest, the best no better worth in his sight than the lost and lowest. Light for the world! Universal sympathy for every character and condition. No characteristic of our Lord is more remarkable than His many-sidedness. And it is so because it so thoroughly corresponds with the ideal of humanity. Nothing could be more misconceived than the representation of him as a Jew, the product of his race, the embodiment of the spirit of his age and his religion. On the human side alone, he is ideal man. No capacity, no weakness, no aspiration of men, but has its profoundest counterpart in him, and therefore its sympathy and inspiration. He is of all men the most human, most manly, and therefore most helpful. "The Word became Flesh."

And this truth appears most conspicuously in the *death* of Christ. As this was the real and spiritual sacrifice, offered once for all, it was necessarily for all at once. No longer under

the conditions of the ritual, with High Priest, and altars and temples, all of which were the instruments of restriction to a chosen race, it was the substance of which these were the shadow. And therefore when the real sacrifice was paid, these must be for ever done away. When Christ died types and predictions were emptied of all value. And as real, it was also adequate in its value for the sins of all men, and precisely adapted to the condition of all men as sinners. And as real, adequate and adapted, it must be freely offered to all men. No reservation is compatible with its essential nature. And on the other hand, and as a consequence also of its reality, the condition of its efficacy can only be faith. As Paul argued and Luther preached, faith only, must be necessary to its effect. Every one who accepts it must be saved by it. And faith is a personal condition, possible for all men everywhere by the aid of God's Spirit. The very nature of the atonement involves its universality. The death of Christ would not be proclaimed, without in the very statement including its application to the world. John the Baptist would not point to the Lamb of God, as the real fulfilment of the typical sacrifice, without adding in the same sentence, which taketh away the sin of the world. Jesus could not say to Nicodemus that he was to be lifted up, without adding as its necessary complement, that he would draw all men unto him. So Paul declares that the Cross is the point of union between Jew and Gentile, and between man and God. "It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; and having made peace through the blood of his Cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven. And you that were sometimes alienated, and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled." He could not die, in the nature of things, for a class, or for a nation. Such provision must be for the race.

And as he passed to his throne it certainly must be to dominion over the whole earth, and not earth only but heaven. Now if in the incarnation and death of Christ the idea is neces-

sarily included of abundant application, of wealth in provision, of a glorious conquest of humanity, is it possible that any believer should by faith so come into union with that death, as to receive its pardoning benefit, and into union with that risen and reigning Saviour, so as to partake of his life, and imagine that in the appropriation to himself he has done all that is required of him? That all this has been done for him for his own sake only? Or that he can have any work to do, or any worth in the kingdom of Christ, but to spread the knowledge of salvation, and bring others to its joys to the praise of the grace of God?

4. The same truth is evidently displayed in the Mission of the Holy Ghost, and the establishment thereby of a Spiritual dispensation. During the presence of the Lord on earth, all eyes were directed to him, and all hopes centered in his immediate presence. To be with him, to follow him, to learn of him, was the earnest longing of his disciples. On this account, in large part, he told them that it was expedient for them that he should go away, that he might send the Comforter to them, to establish a union with him closer than that of sight and sense, so that the work of the Spirit with all that it implies of enlightenment and guidance, might be no longer embarrassed by local restrictions. So that those afar off might be as near to him as those nigh at hand. And thus their spiritual life might be exercised and strengthened by the immediate influence of the Spirit within them. In the very nature of spiritual influence lies the evidence that it can be subject to no restrictions. The Spirit does not deal with organizations, or with nations, or with classes of men, primarily. He does not act through external means, but immediately in the soul. He exerts a personal power upon individual men. Men, as men, are the subjects of his grace. And therefore no conditions external to individual men, can restrict his grace. No conditions of race, forms of organization, or of external privilege of any kind, can either procure or prevent his operations; but faith only, and obedience, which are per-

sonal to the believer. Here is a grand distinction between the Old Dispensation and the New, that faith no longer rests on intermediate representations of the truth, but upon Christ in person, and that by the agency of the Holy Ghost, the soul enjoys this immediate access to and communion with God, and therefore every barrier to the universal spread of the gospel is done away. Nations without a ritual, a temple, a priesthood or a sacrifice, stand by the Spirit in the inmost courts of divine manifestation. Men everywhere are the proper subjects of salvation, and the way is open for carrying its promises to the ends of the earth. In the nature of things the Spirit cannot be bestowed in any other way, or upon any other terms, and the very fact of his outpouring is therefore the evidence of his universal extension.

How central this truth was in the occurrences at Pentecost is familiar to all. The multitude from all nations spake in unknown languages. Peter quotes the prophecy of Joel, to the effect that all distinctions of age, sex, station, or nationality were henceforth to be abolished, and that the Spirit was now come upon them that were nigh, and them that were afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And in accordance with this essential character of the Spirit's operations, the practical effect is that each one who receives the Holy Spirit becomes himself the centre of a new diffusion. Regenerated and illumined and filled with the love of God, he is impelled to communicate to others also. Standing in new relations to God and to his fellow men, he is deterred by no outward conditions from bringing all within his reach to the same blessings. By all his sense of gratitude for good bestowed, by all his sense of sin and unworthiness under which the grace has been received, by all his sympathy with the wants and dangers of his fellows in like condition with himself, he is compelled to use his utmost effort in bringing others to Christ. Impelled by the powers of a new life, by the certitudes of a new faith which cannot be gainsaid, by the conscious communications of a strength more than human, he be-

comes the most fitting instrument of the Spirit in spreading his conquests among men. As is said of Andrew and John, the first disciples called by Jesus, when they went to call their brethren, "they were no sooner Christians then they were missionaries."

5. And because this is the essential nature of Spiritual operations, we see, in the next place, that the idea of Missions is incorporated in the very idea of the Church; and so vitally incorporated that the church has no existence apart from it. The church does not consist of the seed of Abraham after the flesh; it is not made up of those who are circumcised and conform to the conditions of the Mosaic covenant; it does not consist of the baptized, nor of those standing in any outward relation to any organization of men. It is composed of the elect of God, in whom his Holy Spirit dwells by faith. By the Spirit they are united to Christ, and are therefore become one with one another; one body, one church. And without that indwelling there is no church. And as the gift of the Spirit is without restriction, so is the church necessarily coextensive with the gift of the Spirit. Without believers in Christ, called out of every kindred and people under heaven, there is no church of Christ upon earth. And therefore the church by its initial constitution and in the very idea of its being is a Missionary institution, composed of the scattered company of the people of God, and with the law of self perpetuation imposed upon it, existing for the very purpose of extending itself, and bringing the nations into its living union. For this reason when our Lord founded his church on earth, it was, as at Pentecost, by the effusion of the Holy Spirit upon all. For this reason, when he ascended, the great promise, made not for immediate consolation so much as for future guidance, was that the Holy Spirit should be given continuously unto the end. For this reason he sketched to his disciples the future contests and persecutions his people should meet with in the world, all of which should issue in the glorious triumph of his kingdom in his Second Coming. For the

same reason when he commissioned his Apostles, it was with the express command, "Go into all the world and preach my gospel to every creature." And to this idea of the Church as a Missionary organization the Book of Acts remarkably corresponds; for, amidst all vicissitudes of persecution and internal corruption, the fundamental thought of the book is growth. Three thousand at Pentecost, five thousand later, among people and priests, in spite of persecution and because of persecution, in spite of hypocritical members and of internal dissensions, and because of overcoming these, it continued to grow. From Jerusalem to Samaria, to Cyprus, and to Antioch; from Antioch to Pamphylia and Pisidia, to Galatia and Phrygia, to Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, and Corinth; to Ephesus, Colossae and Laodicea, until from Jerusalem round about unto Illyricum there was no space left, and the circle must widen westward to Rome also. In the first instance, in the nature of the case, the process must begin in Palestine, and among Jews. It was only the more efficient because the church at first failed to understand the universal scope of her mission, and concentrated her energies upon the field within her reach; yet the Spirit within her could not long be thus confined. It burst the barriers of the ritual, and spread on every side and by every opportunity, without waiting for Apostles either to lead or to point the way. Apostles themselves regarded with wonder the expansive force of the gospel which they were commissioned to teach, and learned by the effect of the Spirit in the church as well as by the revelation of the Spirit within them, the purpose of God toward the world. It follows, therefore, that in whatever degree the church fails to appreciate her duty to the world, and to neglect the means of this growth, she vitiates the idea of her being, and dwarfs and despiritualizes her life. It follows that these notions of ours of churches restricted nationally, or by denominations, and these distinctions between the church and her missionary agencies,—as though the life were in the home organization, and only the far off and secondary channel of her

life were in the Missionaries she sends to the frontier or to the heathen—are ideas contrary to New Testament truth. Nay, if we must make distinctions, let us rather say that the Missionary work is the church, and the home organization is the appendage. Paul and his Missions were more than Jerusalem and Antioch combined. And let us be assured that the law of her being is, that in proportion to her sound and spiritual extension abroad, will be the vigour and illumination of her life at home.

6. Nothing can be more instructive than to study the way in which this idea of universality is inwrought into the structure of the New Testament both in its history and the development of its doctrine. We have seen that it is included in that love which is the life principle of the church; in the purpose of God in salvation; in the sending, the incarnation and atonement of Christ; in the mission of the Holy Spirit: and in the idea of the church when first instituted on earth. Now look at the New Testament in its broad outlines of history and literature. Its history is the history of Missions; its epistles are the literature of its Missions. The great, comprehensive, historical fact of the Apostolic period is the change of dispensations; that is, the calling of the Gentiles; that is, Missions. The great, fundamental truth of the gospel is justification by faith. We have seen how indissolubly connected these two are; that the one is the expression in history of the other, which is the life principle moulding that expression. That because the real, spiritual sacrifice has been made, there can be no condition of salvation other than faith, and because faith is the sole condition, the application must be universal. And as this truth, taught by Christ and brought into life by the Spirit, found expression in the extension of the church, so on the other hand, the church came to full comprehension of the truth, and of its relations, so as to reduce it to definition and to carry it to its intended results, by means of this extension. In this sense it is eminently true that history was before doctrine. The Apostles in Jerusalem, in the nature of the case, necessarily devoted themselves to witnessing for Christ, and promoting

the growth of the church among the Jews, at first. There must be a material basis for wider extension. The leaven spread from within. And in order to their greater efficiency in this work, their minds are not distracted by ulterior questions, about the abrogation of the law, or the calling of the Gentiles. Peter and James especially, therefore, hold the door open for Jews, and continue to do so to the end of their lives. Meanwhile we have seen that the expansive force of this new idea, or rather the force of this new life, has, unconsciously to themselves, pressed beyond the limits of Judaism, and Gentiles are brought in, and Gentile Missions established. How did the church learn not only that faith in Christ was the way of salvation, but more than this that circumcision was no longer to be enforced, and that righteousness was in no sense by the law? You say that these are truths of salvation taught only by the Spirit of God, through men inspired to communicate them. And you say truly. But it is equally true that the Spirit of God taught these truths to Paul, by Missions. Persecution scattered the church, and the Spirit within them impelled believers to preach, and Gentiles were converted. And thus Paul came to see and understand the scope and application of the work of Christ. Then the church at Jerusalem rejoiced that upon Gentiles also God had bestowed eternal life. Then Peter said to complaining Jewish Christians, Who can refuse water that these should not be baptized! What was I that I could withstand God! On the one hand, Paul writes to the Ephesians (ch. iii : 3–6) that his knowledge that "the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel," was a mystery made known to him by revelation, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men. And on the other hand, we learn the method of that revelation by the Spirit, not only in the important fact that the work was already begun and had made good progress before Paul entered upon it, but we read it even more clearly in the fact that his statement and argument for his doctrine of justification are but the elucidation of principles involved, and vindication of truths which lay at the basis

of his Missionary activity. Justification is through Christ because of the universal sinfulness of men, Jews as well as Gentiles. There can be no righteousness by the law, therefore, but only in Christ, and therefore for all men. The mystery of Christ seems in Paul's mind to be almost identical with the mystery of the calling of the Gentiles; the extent of the atonement is involved in the nature of it. Thus the church owes the very title deeds of her existence, the very doctrines of her salvation, to the early Missionary impulse of the Holy Spirit. And so also, when Paul passes on to his Christological Epistles, we trace the same motive, in part at least, of expanding and establishing the idea of the dignity of the Person of Christ, as necessary on the one hand, to furnish an adequate value for the universal sacrifice, and as the other, to exhibit his right to his glorious reign as head over all things to his church, possessing all might and dominion and majesty and judgment. And when we pass on to that picture in the gospel of John, the heavenly gospel, telling of Christ's testifying of himself, and speaking of things which he had received from the Father, who does not see that the same, or rather a higher universalism pervades the whole; that Jew and Judaizer, are now all forgotten; that man as man, as he stands before God in relation to Christ, believing or rejecting, is alone in question; that this idea of universality, the salvation of the world, its new creation, is alone in place. And the Apocalypse carries forward the hope of the church into the future, when the promises shall be fulfilled, and the effect of the spiritual life completely realized.

Let us see to it that whether we stay at home or go abroad, travel by land or by sea, preach in our own or in a foreign language, labour on the frontier or in the great cities, that we be Missionaries; not content unless the church grows by our instrumentality, both in extension and in inward grace; lest by self seeking we vitiate the truth of our own Spiritual life, and separate ourselves from the flow of that blessing that comes from Christ through his Holy Spirit.

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